



STATE OF MICHIGAN

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Independence
Agency**

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News Release

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FIA Honors Alcona County Woman

HARRISVILLE—Jim Nye director of Outstate Operations for the Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA) presented the agency's July Achiever of the Month Award to Leah Mathis of Lincoln during a ceremony held at the United Methodist Church in Harrisville.

The Achiever of the Month Award was established in October 1993 to recognize persons making outstanding progress toward self-sufficiency under Michigan's comprehensive welfare reform initiative *To Strengthen Michigan's Families*. Leah Mathis was selected to receive the July award because of her determination to become independent of the welfare system despite significant barriers to her success.

Ms. Mathis and her three children moved from Arizona to Alcona County in 2000 to escape a domestic violence situation and seek opportunities to make a new life. At that time she applied to the Alcona County FIA for public assistance. She received Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits, food stamps and Medicaid to help make ends meet.

(more)



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

When Ms. Mathis first moved to the area, the family lived in a tent and later an old travel trailer on her father's property. FIA assisted Leah in an intense housing search and finally in May 2001 housing was located. The agency also helped the family purchase household items.

In September 2000, Leah found part-time employment at the Greenbush Tavern as a salad maker. To improve her employment skills she was referred to the Work First program where she attended job search and job readiness training. Later, to build additional employment skills she was placed at a Community Work Experience Placement site. In addition, Work First provided funds for eye glasses and interview clothing. When her car broke down, Work First paid for car repairs.

In February 2001, Ms. Mathis obtained a second part-time job as a cook with the Alcona County Sheriff Department. They were so pleased with her work, she was soon hired full-time with benefits. Leah's FIP case closed on March 27, 2001. She continues to receive food stamp benefits and Transitional Medicaid.

Because she has demonstrated the ability to meet life's challenges and proved that it is possible to succeed against the odds, Leah Mathis became the ninety-second Michigan resident to be honored with the Achiever of the Month Award.

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